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It's Good Food - Don't Waste It

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A broadcast by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, broadcast Tuesday, October 14, 1941, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, over stations associated with the NBC Blue Network.

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WALLACE KADDERLY:

And here in Washington, our message today starts with information on the home side -- a report on some of the questions put to the home economics experts these days. And again Ruth Van Deman of the Department's Bureau of Home Economics is here to do the reporting.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

There's one question we're getting that stumps the home economics experts, frankly, Wallace.

KADDERLY:

What's that?

VAN DEMAN:

I should say it's only one of many. But this one's been coming so often lately, I'm getting embarrassed. A newspaper man called me on the telephone this morning, and was a little put out, I think, that we couldn't give him the perfect answer. And it does sound like a simple enough question --- how much food is wasted in the average home?

KADDERLY:

You mean to say you haven't a neat statistic on that, with the exact percentage on this, that, and the other kind of waste all figured out?

VAN DEMAN:

Sorry we haven't. And it's not an easy thing to get at. How many kinds of waste on food would you say there are, necessary and just plain careless?

KADDERLY:

Offhand, I'd say a half a dozen probably.

VAN DEMAN:

There are about twice that many ways to waste vitamins, and minerals, and other food values as you cook and fix food ready to eat.

KADDERLY:

No fair. That's like a fisherman claiming the biggest fish are those that got away. I was thinking about food wastes you can see.

VAN DEMAN:

But this is no fish story. Even if you can't have the tantalizing pleasure of seeing the vitamins roll an eye at you as they disappear into the blue.

(Over)

KADDERLY

And I don't believe anybody ever saw a mineral flip a fin as it sailed down the sink in the juices drained off the vegetables, either ---

VAN DEMAN:

All joking aside, that unseen waste of food values is one of our most serious kinds of food waste. --- But let's stick to the seen kinds. What are some of the half dozen ways you thought of?

KADDERLY:

I've noticed sometimes when a man goes to market he is inclined to buy more than the family can eat. Everything looks so good. And he doesn't stop to work out beforehand just what is to be cooked when.

VAN DEMAN:

Unplanned marketing. --- It isn't only men that do that.

KADDERLY:

Sometimes it's economy to buy in quantity, sometimes not. It depends a lot on storage facilities. And with a small family a lot of perishable food may spoil before it can be used.

VAN DEMAN:

Unless the left-overs are planned for in advance.

KADDERLY:

Left-overs planned in advance? I'd thought left-overs were something that just happened.

VAN DEMAN:

Not always. Even with a green vegetable like spinach, I know some families who always cook enough for dinner so they'll have some left over to make cream-of-spinach soup for supper next day. Or some to serve with poached eggs as eggs Florentine.

KADDERLY:

On the unplanned left-overs, I expect if there could be a nation-wide census taken all in one day of the food pushed back on shelves -- drying out, souring, moulding, spoiling in one way or another, the figures would be staggering.

VAN DEMAN:

I'm sure they would. And so would the figures on green vegetables, lettuce for instance, wilting in the corners of the warm pantries until the outer leaves have to be thrown away. Or bottles of milk standing forgotten in the warm sun on porches, so that it sours sooner than it should.

KADDERLY:

But sour milk is still good to use in cooking.

VAN DEMAN:

Right. But not as easy to use oftentimes as sweet milk. It's hard to judge the amount of sourness. Suppose you're making corn bread, for instance, or muffins, or biscuits with sour milk. You need just the right amount of soda to neutralize the acid of the sour milk. Too much soda spoils the flavor and turns the bread yellow.

KADDERLY:

Pretty hard to take when bread's like that. I'd almost rather go without.

VAN DEMAN:

So would I. But quantities of good materials are wasted in kitchens all the time because cooks don't stop to measure ingredients accurately. I've been guilty myself plenty of times.

KADDERLY:

But I thought a good cook went by instinct.

VAN DEMAN:

Some can with some kinds of dishes. But with a mixture like muffins or cake where the proportions of moist or dry ingredients, leavening to flour, and so on, makes all the difference to the texture, it pays to stick to the rule. I understand that's law in one of the chains of restaurants famous for its excellent food, and for food that's always the same. If the cook's caught making any one of the hundreds of dishes on their menu, without the recipe in front of her or him (they employ lots of men chefs too), it's cause for dismissal.

KADDERLY:

That's the only way to keep up the standard. And of course they have a cost accounting system. It would soon pick up any noticeable waste or raw materials.

VAN DEMAN:

Those professional chefs mind their cooking temperatures too. They don't waste food by burning, or scorching, or shriveling it up so it isn't appetizing.

KADDERLY:

That would be something, wouldn't it, --- a national statistic on the burned potatoes, scorched bacon, over-cooked meat and vegetables. ---But the home cook can use temperature control in her own kitchen. I've heard you give temperatures for roasting meat many times.

VAN DEMAN:

Very true. By holding the temperature of the oven to moderate when you're roasting beef, for instance, it's possible to keep the shrinkage down to 20 per cent. And the meat drippings and fat that cook out are just right for gravy.

KADDERLY:

And what's the shrinkage when you turn the heat on full tilt?

VAN DEMAN:

Almost twice that much ---somewhere around 35 to 40 per cent. And the fat is burned black --- unfit for anything but the garbage can.

KADDERLY:

That's another spot where I'm afraid lots of us aren't as economical as we might be - that's on fats.

VAN DEMAN:

It isn't only what's burned so it has to be thrown away, or left on plates. I'm thinking of the jars of bacon fat and meat drippings left uncovered near the hot stove, and turning more rancid every day. If kept covered and cool and sweet, fat like that is good to fry with and as seasoning for vegetables.

KADDERLY:

That's so, air, and light, and a warm spot, do turn most fats rancid in a hurry.--- Then there can be a great waste in preparing vegetables and fruits.

VAN DEMAN:

Right you are. I was looking this morning at some figures from careful tests showing what happens when you pare potatoes. Want to give a guess at how much of the potato disappears?

KADDERLY:

I'd say roughly maybe 10 per cent.

VAN DEMAN:

Double that and you'll be nearer the average. And that's not being careless with the knife either.

KADDERLY:

That's 12 pounds out of a 60 pound bushel of potatoes.

VAN DEMAN:

But by cooking potatoes in their jackets first, and then peeling off the thin skin, the loss can be cut to almost nothing - only about 5 per cent.

KADDERLY:

Well, I've lost track here of how many kinds of food wastes we've mentioned. It's more than a half dozen, I'm sure of that. And we haven't got around to all.

VAN DEMAN:

You know there's an old saying - "A French family can live on what an American family throws away."

KADDERLY:

I won't accept that 100 per cent. But there probably are several grains of truth in it.

But what I'm wondering now, Ruth, is which of your home economics bulletins you're going to recommend for suggestions on stopping these food wastes.

VAN DEMAN:

That's a problem too. Every one on food has good pointers.

KADDERLY:

Well, suppose we start with bread.

VAN DEMAN:

All right. "Homemade bread, cake, and pastry."

KADDERLY:

and we'll take one on meat.

VAN DEMAN:

Let's say beef for that. "Cooking beef according to the cut."

KADDERLY:

Ad lib offer Homemade Bread, Cake, and Pastry.--- Cooking Beef According to the Cut.

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